STOUT, NAOMI GRACE. A Study of Pipe Dreams in the Last Plays of Eugene O'Neill. (1968) Directed by: Dr. Donald Darnell. pp. 65

The characters in four of Eugene O'Neill's last plays--A Touch of the Poet, The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey into Night, and A Moon for the Misbegotten--have inherited aspirations for an ideal world which cannot be satisfied in the realm to which they are doomed to exist. The confines of their environment exasperate them, so they dream into an imaginative world where all is beautiful and good. Because they are living in two worlds--one of reality, the other of imagination--they are continually tortured by the deep longing of their dreams and by the harsh reality of their surroundings. The result is mounting despair.

The aim of this thesis is to study the dilemma and the answer O'Neill gives through the words of Larry Slade in The Iceman Cometh, namely, that "it is the lie of the pipe dream that gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober." This illusion brings order out of the chaos of the present but incapacitates man for meaningful action. The only alternative is death.

In A Touch of the Poet, O'Neill shows that it is the lie of the pipe dream that provides strength to live. If the lie of the pipe dream is exposed and man is unable to reconcile himself to its falseness, then there is only death. When Con Melody, the play's leading character, can no longer perpetuate his pipe dream, he is, in reality, a dead man.

The world of The Iceman Cometh is almost a painless

purgatory where, not love and peace, but peace alone is the central human need. Three ways are proposed in which man can find peace: through dreams, drunkenness, or death. The first two ways do not prove to be successful, and again death remains the answer.

In Long Day's Journey into Night, O'Neill has shown himself, his elder brother, his father, and his mother as they slip back and forth from one grim illusion to another. As he has his mother explain in the play, "None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever." This is a play of lostness in which the only means of belonging and relativity is through the pipe dream.

A Moon for the Misbegotten continues the theme of the pipe dream. Tyrone is an alcoholic seeking escape from his own inadequacies and from the guilt he bears for action he has taken against his mother. Josie, his pipe dream lover, seeks escape from her own grotesqueness through a shared pipe dream. When their illusion is exposed, Josie can go on simply because she can recognize but accept her pipe dream, using its buoyant powers despite its very obvious falsity. But for Tyrone, honesty cuts through the lie and leaves him with no choice but the oblivion to be found in death.

A STUDY OF PIPE DREAMS IN THE LAST PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The deep despair which pervades the last plays of Eugene O'Neill becomes so dominant in the lives of the characters that O'Neill has termed it a "life sickness." O'Neill explained in a letter to George Jean Nathan that he believed the roots of this sickness lay in the "death of the Old God and the failure of science and materialism to provide any satisfying new One."[1] The surviving primitive religious instinct in man is therefore unable to find a meaning for life, nor is it able to comfort its fears of death. The last plays of O'Neill are concerned with man's efforts to find release from this despair.

The tale of despair is not new with O'Neill. Shakespeare recognized it when he made Macbeth say that "life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more." This despair is seen by Calvin Linton in Christianity Today as the "utter deadness, mingled horribly with continued self-consciousness which is the condition of the damned."[2] T. S. Eliot's hollow men show this despair

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[1]Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York, 1962), p. 601.

[2]Calvin D. Linton, "The Effortless Journey,"

when they whisper together, for their utterances are "quiet and meaningless as wind in dry grass or rats' feet over broken glass." O'Neill's characters reveal despair by their indirection and purposelessness.

Eugene O'Neill shows in his plays that man's primary need arising out of this despair is a longing for a life of meaning and purpose, for a sense of order in a universe to which he can belong and in which he can trust. This search for purpose and belonging begins in his earliest plays where O'Neill argues that life consists largely in the struggle to create a bearable existence in the midst of the despair that surrounds man and almost overwhelms him.

In order to create a bearable existence, man must try to establish his own identity and its place in the universe. In a letter to the New York Herald Tribune, O'Neill expressed his concern for this struggle:

> The Hairy Ape was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way. Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he's in the middle, trying to make peace, taking the "woist punches from bot' of 'em." . . . Yank can't go forward, and so he tries to go back. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But he can't go back to belonging either. The gorilla kills him. The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle

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Christianity Today, IV (November 1960), 3.

> used to be with the gods, but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt to belong.[3]

In assigning to the Hairy Ape the kind of belonging which can be found in death, O'Neill embarked on a journey of rejection that would ultimately end in death. Because O'Neill's man is not an angel and no longer a primitive, he finds himself standing between heaven and hell, finding less and less meaning as society becomes more complex. He also finds it impossible to return to the world of nature from whence he came. In this play there is no way out of the dilemma. Man's inability to return to his former innocence finds its conclusive symbol in death at the hands of the beast. Having betrayed nature, he cannot return to his former self.

O'Neill's concern with man's dilemma continues in the plays following The Hairy Ape. O'Neill's characters attempt escape from despair through romantic dreams. It is evident that they dream because they are incapable of reconciling themselves to the limitations of the world in which they must live. But their inherited aspirations for an ideal world cannot be satisfied in the realm to which they are doomed to exist. The narrow confines of their environment irk them, so they dream beyond their

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[3]Letter addressed to New York Herald Tribune, November 18, 1924, as quoted in Doris Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1958), p. 34.

horizons into an imaginative world where all is beautiful and good. Living in two worlds, the one of reality, the other of imagination, they are continually tortured by the passionate longing of their dreams and the grim reality of their immediate surroundings. The result is mounting despair, for O'Neill's dreamers become lost somewhere between reality and their ideal. In discussing this theme, Sophus Keith Winther says:

> No single idea has made so deep and abiding an impression on the mind of O'Neill as that of the destructive power of the romantic ideal, or the power of illusion to lead man to deny the reality which lies about him at every hand, and in the strength of his denial to create a world of fantastic dreams as a substitute for that reality.[4]

The destruction comes when these dreamers substitute an exaggerated and idealized illusion for reality--an illusion beyond all possibility of achievement. When this illusion comes crashing down, they are hurt, often shattered, without being able to understand why their dreams have fallen apart. They do not realize that they have asked more from life than life has to offer them.

This paper is concerned specifically with O'Neill's tale of despair. His four last major plays have been chosen for this particular study. They include A Touch of the Poet, written in 1935-1942; The Iceman Cometh, written in

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[4]Sophus Keith Winther, Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study (New York, 1961), p. 17.

1939; Long Day's Journey into Night, written in 1939-1941; and A Moon for the Misbegotten, written in 1943. Hughie, written in 1941-1942, is not included since it is a one-act play and merely duplicates the theme of The Iceman Cometh.[5] More Stately Mansions was published later from a manuscript found after O'Neill's death. Though similar in theme, its treatment differs; therefore, it has been excluded from this study.

The specific proposition to be investigated in this paper is summed up in the words of Larry Slade in The Iceman Cometh--namely, that "it is the lie of the pipe dream that gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober."[6] Each play clearly presents O'Neill's probing into the nature of the pipe dream and man's need for it. This paper proposes simply to reveal this probing and to show how O'Neill arrived at the only alternative to the pipe dream--that is, death.

The general theme of illusion as found in the romantic dream appears in many O'Neill plays. In Beyond the Horizon, for example, the playwright shows his characters basing their lives on an illusion that sometimes

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[5]For a chronological table of O'Neill's published plays, see Gelb and Gelb, p. 944.

[6]Eugene O'Neill, The Iceman Cometh (New York, 1946), I, p. 10.

takes the form of a dream of beauty, sometimes of love, and sometimes physical passion. In later plays, Ponce de Leon of The Fountain quests after the illusion of love and fame; Marco Polo of Marco Millions searches after the illusion of power; Lazarus of Lazarus Laughed seeks the solution of the problem of life everlasting; and Reuben Light in Dynamo pursues a religion that he can believe in. It is, however, always the quest that counts--the quest that never ends, the search for happiness, the hope for an ultimate meaning and justification of life.

Beyond the Horizon provides an excellent opportunity for studying O'Neill's use of illusion. The main character, Robert Mayo, is a tall, slender young man of twenty-three. As is true with many of O'Neill's characters, there is a touch of the poet about him expressed in his high forehead and wide, dark eyes. He is a dreamer who cannot be reconciled to the life of the farm, who is forever striving for a life that is more than a life but not realizing that such a life is no life at all. His brother Andrew says to him, "You do take the prize for daydreaming."[7] Robert's explanation is that something is calling him. These nebulous dreams can live only as vague longings in the mind of Robert, who is unable to accept the reality

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[7]Eugene O'Neill, Beyond the Horizon, in Ah, Wilderness! and Two Other Plays (New York, n.d.), I,i,p.202. Act and page numbers hereafter given in text.

of the world that lies about him. Reality has lost its meaning, for he has come to relate only to the mystical experiences which are creations of his imagination. He says to his brother:

> Supposing I was to tell you that it's just Beauty that's calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East which lures me in the books I've read, the need of the freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on--in quest of the secret which is hidden over there, beyond the horizon? (I,ii,p. 206)

As is characteristic of these dreamers, Robert abandons his chance to test his dream of what lies "beyond" in order to follow another dream equally futile, that of a love that will answer the needs of his life. The bitter tragedy of his love follows as a natural consequence of his false idealism and his inability to accept life as a reality. His dreaming makes him ineffectual. The hills that surround his farm are "like the walls of a narrow prison yard shutting [him] in from all the freedom and wonder of life!" (II,i,p.255) In his explanation of Robert's dilemma, Winther suggests that Robert does not realize that

> . . . life, itself, is a prison, and that there is no escape beyond the horizon, except the escape that comes with death, an escape that brings peace, but without the realization of what it has brought--obliteration of both pain and the hope of happiness.[8]

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[8]Winther, p. 19.

Robert's dream of love fades, and in its place comes the dream that life would be better in the city. He speaks to Ruth, telling her, "Life owes us some happiness after what we've been through. It must! Otherwise our suffering would be meaningless . . . and that is unthinkable" (III,1,p.284). Even though his hope is futile, it is not as unrealistic as his philosophy of the universe, for it is always the final gesture of the romantic idealist to assume that his suffering bears some compensating virtue and that the universe is built on some ethical plan.

According to Winther, the greatest disillusionment that O'Neill's characters experience is "the realization that there is no connection between what man desires from life and what he gets; that the universe as such is impersonal and takes no account of man's hopes and fears, joys and despairs."[9] The beginning of man's tragedy lies in his inability to accept reality as it is. The false ideals that he sets up soon prove to be the factors that separate him from reality, and he is never quite able to find his way back again. Also, because he has imagined some impossible perfection, he necessarily despairs of realizing it and consequently is lost between reality and the dream. Seeking only absolute dreams and freedoms, he rejects all partial

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[9]Ibid., p. 20.

dreams. In the end, because he recognizes the impossibility of his romantic dreams, he loses faith in his future and in his dreams.

O'Neill believed that the destructive power of the romantic ideal or dream has ruined more lives than all the diseases. Because of this belief, he strips the romantic dream of its delusions. But he also recognized, as T. S. Eliot did, that "human kind cannot bear very much reality."[10] Thus, in his last plays, he was no longer concerned with the good or evil of the exposed dream but rather with a second and more efficacious means of transcending the despair of life. O'Neill knew man must find a substitute for the broken romantic dream because he could not bear a pitiless reality. The substitute was the pipe dream. This pipe dream is not derived from an outreach toward some ideal but is derived from man's desperate need to construct hastily something that he can place between himself and the impending failure of his dream.

At no time does O'Neill propose the wisdom of the illusion, or pipe dream, as a means of protection against destruction. For him there is no such practical compromise. There is no value according to which illusion might be tolerated. There is no choice. Man can only

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[10]T. S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral, in Contemporary Drama, ed. E. Bradlee Watson (New York, 1959), p. 373.

continue to live by illusion; the only alternative is death. This illusion brings order out of the chaos of the present but incapacitates him for meaningful action. The illusory qualities of the pipe dream strike a death blow to any forward action of its victim because the pipe dream tends to lead man further and further from reality. Yet, life is possible only with the aid of illusion for this reality is intolerable. Therefore, the romantic dream which arose from the futile quest for identity and belonging in the first plays, and which in the later plays became a means of superseding reality, evolves into the deadly but, to O'Neill, necessary pipe dream of the last plays.

CHAPTER II

THE PIPE DREAM OF FULFILLMENT IN *A TOUCH OF THE POET*

A Touch of the Poet illustrates the way in which the pipe dream takes the place of a romantic dream that cannot be realized. Cornelius Melody, the play's central figure, has aspired to all that is noble, fine, and admired in life. His pride cannot face the truth of his miserable failure, so it constructs a pipe dream that will allow him to enjoy what life will not. He is obsessed by the self-delusion that he is a Byronic hero and projects this image repeatedly through his quoting of Byron's lines:

> I have not loved the World, nor the World me,
> I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed
> To its idolatries a patient knee,
> Nor coined my cheek to smiles . . . nor cried aloud
> In worship of an echo; in the crowd
> They could not deem me one of such--I stood
> Among them, but not of them.[1]

Through Melody's assumption of this role, he is able to step out from among the common herd with which he is associated. By perpetuating this illusion, he is able to keep a self-respect which would be lost if he faced

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[1]Eugene O'Neill, *A Touch of the Poet* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1966), I, p. 43. Act and page numbers hereafter given in text.

up to reality. This illusion is his passport into a world to which he can never rightfully belong.

Melody, who was born the son of an Irish innkeeper, spends his energies in rebellion against his humble origin. His father began life as a "thievin' shebeen keeper who got rich by money lendin' and squeezin' tenants and every manner of trick" (I,p. 11). Once wealthy, Con's father bought a castle on an estate in Ireland and educated his son to be a gentleman. However, Con is rejected by the aristocratic gentry, and he in turn rejects the peasants. This is his way of striking back at a heritage that prevents the realization of his dream. His alienation causes him to feel a desperate need to belong to some group and to find a real identity for himself. The pride in him still demands that he be identified with the aristocrats.

Young Con Melody falls in love with a pretty Irish peasant, Nora, and marries her after she has become pregnant. He leaves her on his father's estate, where his daughter Sara is born. Melody then goes off to the Napoleonic wars as a major in the British army. His good looks and suave manner, coupled with a quick temper, result in his involvement with the wife of a fellow officer. Melody is forced to leave the army in disgrace after killing the officer in a duel.

Melody immigrates to America with Nora and Sara and here is swindled into buying a tavern in a Boston village.

Unknown to Melody, passers-by are diverted from the tavern by a new thoroughfare, thus bringing him business failure and near-bankruptcy. Yet he continues to play his role as the Major and respected property-owner. Feeding this aristocratic illusion are the facts that he did fight bravely under Wellington at the Battle of Talavera and that he keeps a thoroughbred mare. Every year he celebrates the anniversary of the Battle of Talavera by donning his old uniform and inviting some of his old cronies to the tavern for feasting, drinking, and reminiscing. They oblige by feeding his pipe dream and at times sharing it with him. As is the case with the pipe dreamers, it is necessary for outsiders to aid in supporting the pipe dream. The dreamer himself is not able to bear the full responsibility, for his strength is taken in continuing the conflict and combatting the doubts that tend to arise.

Melody's pipe dream costs his family dearly and makes him a very lonely man. He refuses to mix with the "Irish scum" around Boston and is not accepted by the Yankee aristocrats. While his wife and daughter secretly enjoy and share his pipe dream to some extent, they at the same time spoil it for him--his wife, because she has so worn herself out with menial work to support his fancy ways that her appearance constantly reminds him of his unaristocratic marriage; his daughter, because she wants to rise in the world and attacks Melody for a self-indulgence

that stands in her way.

Meanwhile, a young aristocratic Yankee, Simon Harford, has taken a cabin on the grounds of the tavern with the intention of isolating himself from society and living a simple life next to nature. Simon becomes ill and moves into the tavern where he is cared for by Sara. This move provides opportunity for Sara to act in behalf of her romantic dream. Sara's romantic dream and her father's are similar. Both desire to outreach their inherited environments and to secure themselves in the world of the aristocrats. But her disdain for the way her father's pipe dream hinders her own romantic pursuits causes her to identify with her mother as being love's slave.[2]

Nora represents O'Neill's feelings concerning love. He has his characters plead for love, profess love, pursue love, but seldom experience love. For O'Neill, as Edwin Engel states, "love is the prime component of faith,"[3] but for his characters, this faith in life dies with the disappointment and unfulfillment of the romantic dream. With faith dead, the essence of love is gone. It is faith in life, and in the future, that brings

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[2]Sara plays a minor role in A Touch of the Poet because her story is told in More Stately Mansions, the sequel to Touch.

[3]Edwin A. Engel, The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 297.

about reality. With faith dead, love loses touch with the future and no longer has the power to create reality. Instead, it denies reality and creates a sphere which can thrive within its own limitations. Nora's love does just that. Her love has become her pipe dream which blinds her to reality. She is able to see in Melody and in herself only what she desires to see. This places her always on the defensive when Sara begins to accuse her father of illogical action.

As Melody's pipe dream has derived from his pride, so has Nora's. This is revealed when she says, "I've pride in my love for him! I've loved him since the day I set eyes on him, and I'll love him till the day I die!" (I,p.25) She is not willing to face openly the truth that marrying Melody was not what she dreamed it would be. Her romantic dream of living in style as the wife of a major was shattered when she realized the truth of Melody's situation. However, her pipe dream of devoted love can now buoy her up above the heartbreaking despair she suffers. Nora feels love is exercised through service and has talked herself into believing that the service she renders Melody is simply characteristic of the devoted love they share.

Sara strikes at the truth when she says her mother has become a slave to love. Nora denies this: "There's no slavery in it when you love!" (I,p.26) But immediately

she realizes the truth of Sara's statement and confesses, "For the love of God, don't take the pride of my love from me, Sara, for without it what am I at all but an ugly, fat woman gettin' old and sick" (I,p.26). Even though Nora understands the truth of her situation, she must continue living with her pipe dream for she understands this is the only way life can be meaningful to her.

Sara's affair with Simon feeds Melody's pipe dream, for he treats the affair as a projected alliance between great families. He is affronted when the boy's father attempts to buy off the threatened marriage. He goes to Simon's father and offers a gentleman's challenge. Here, he is turned down and roughly handled. This humiliation is watched by Deborah, Simon's mother. Earlier Melody, not realizing who Deborah was, had tried to impress her through flirtations and big talk. Deborah quickly squelched his enthusiasm by her cold, disdainful mannerisms. This was a great blow to Melody's pride, especially when he learned she was the mother of Simon. Now, it is her witnessing of his disgrace that finally destroys his pretense to gentility. Melody then returns home, takes a pistol and kills the mare that has been the symbol of his dream.

Killing the mare is Melody's outward indication of killing the pipe dream that had sustained the Major. When Melody can no longer believe in the Major, he destroys

him. The pride that is the source of Melody's aspirations proves to be the source of his destruction, for he ignores his own limitations and covets a form of godhead. He could never have been what he aspired to be and could never have belonged to the realm he coveted except through the means of a pipe dream. Doris Falk sums up Melody's dilemma by saying that "the tragedy of the need to belong lies in man's desperate drive to identify himself with one aspect of his nature when he is doomed to participate in another."[4]

Melody wanted to identify himself with his inherited pride, his love for the aristocracy. But the peasant in him demanded to be recognized, and he found he could not ignore that aspect of his nature. Evidence of this twofold nature is seen in his role of the Major and in his marriage to Nora. Nora's pipe dream adds to his own dilemma since it is a reminder of the falsity of his role. Recognizing her "sustaining lie" results in greater guilt for him. The resulting tension is characteristic of pipe dreamers torn between opposing aspects of self-identity. Relief from the despair that results from the failure to achieve one's dream can be found only by creating an illusion, a pipe dream. Melody needed the Major, for the Major gave him what life could not. Tragedy came when his sick and

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[4]Doris Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension (New Brunswick, N.J., 1958), p. 36.

swollen ego could not face the reality of its falseness. Confrontation with Simon's parents stripped Melody of his cloak of pretense. The shame of his inevitable failure to keep that which he pretended he had achieved caused him to seek to willfully punish and even destroy himself (the mare served as a substitute). Melody explains to Sara why he killed his beautiful mare:

> Why did the Major, you mean! Be Christ, you're stupider than I thought you, if you can't see that. Wasn't she the livin' reminder, so to spake, av all his lyin' boasts and dreams? He meant to kill her first wid one pistol, and then himself wid the other. But faix, he saw the shot that killed her had finished him, too. There wasn't much pride left in the auld lunatic, anyway, and seeing her die made an end av him. So he didn't bother shooting himself, because it's be a mad thing to waste a good bullet on a corpse! (IV,p.168)

It is important to note that Melody has slipped into the Irish brogue he had so scorned in Nora and Sara. This, along with the killing of his mare, is evidence that the pipe dream no longer exists. At this point there comes to him a kind of "peace." He no longer struggles with illusion, but because of being "dead" he cannot come to terms with reality. Melody differs from Nora in that he can no longer support his pipe dream.

With his clothing torn and dirty, Melody goes into the tavern with the fellows. There is no trace of the Major--he is all peasant now. In the bar one of the peasants, Riley, starts playing a reel on his pipes and

there is the stamp of dancing feet. For a moment Sara's face becomes hard and bitter again. She tries to be mocking when she says, "Faith, Patch Riley don't know it but he's playing a requiem for the dead. May the hero of Talavera rest in peace" (IV,p.182).

In A Touch of the Poet, O'Neill shows that it is the lie of the pipe dream that provides man life. If the lie of the pipe dream is exposed and man is not able to reconcile himself to its falseness, then there is left only death. At the end of the play when Melody, stripped of his glory, goes through the door of the bar, he is in reality a dead man. Life for him is empty and meaningless.

CHAPTER III

DREAMS AND DEATH IN THE ICEMAN COMETH

The world of The Iceman Cometh is almost a painless purgatory where, not love and peace, but peace alone is the central human need. Throughout the later plays of O'Neill, three ways are proposed in which men can find peace--through dreams, drunkenness, or death.[1] In The Iceman Cometh life is endured only with the aid of the pipe dream and the bottle. Deprived of these, men die.

Peace is the central need because the struggle with reality to find an identity and to belong to something has proven futile. To some of the characters, therefore, a form of consolation and sustenance is to be found in dreams and drunkenness. To the others for whom the dream is excruciating and alcohol is powerless, only death remains.

Larry Slade serves as commentator for the action of the play. He is

> . . . tall, raw-boned, with coarse straight white hair, worn long and raggedly cut. He

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[1] Edwin A. Engel, The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 284.

> has a gaunt Irish face with a big nose, high cheekbones, a lantern jaw with a week's stubble of beard, a mystic's meditative pale-blue eyes with a gleam of sharp sardonic humor in them. He stares in front of him, an expression of tired tolerance giving his face the quality of a pitying but weary old priest's.[2]

Remaining somewhat aloof from the others, he has taken a seat, as he says, "in the grandstand of philosophical detachment to fall asleep observing the cannibals do their death dance" (I,p.11).

As the play begins, Larry is sitting at a table in the back room of Harry Hope's saloon. This is the No Chance Saloon, he explains with a sardonic grin:

> It's Bedrock Bar. The End of the Line Café, The Bottom of the Sea Rathskellar! Don't you notice the beautiful calm in the atmosphere? That's because it's the last harbor. No one here has to worry about where they're going next, because there is no farther they can go. It's a great comfort to them. Although even here they keep up the appearance of life with a few harmless pipe dreams about their yesterdays and tomorrows, as you'll see for yourself if you're here long. (I,p.25)

Harry Hope's saloon is patronized by a strange assortment of bums, male and female. Most of them are hopeless wrecks who find in the liquor generously furnished them by their easygoing proprietor an escape from the realities of a world in which they no longer have a place. The derelicts

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[2]Eugene O'Neill, The Iceman Cometh (New York, 1946), I, p. 4. Act and page numbers hereafter given in text.

have found peace, for not only are they spared the worry about where they are going next but also they are enabled to get drunk and keep their pipe dreams, which is all they ask of life. They have all failed in life but are able to continue living because their pipe dreams give them a hopeless hope that tomorrow they will reform and will ultimately succeed. They are all members of the "Tomorrow Movement," the pipe dream they all have in common. The doctrine of the Tomorrow Movement is that "one must keep hope alive through the anticipation of significant action on a day that will never come."[3] Larry observes that he has never known more contented men. They act as though they have attained the true goal of their hearts' desires. But although Larry is aware that "the lie of the pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us" (I,p.10), he refuses to fall for a pipe dream. Convinced that his dreams are all dead and buried, he finds provisional peace in looking ahead, in contemplating "the comforting fact that death is a fine long sleep" (I,p.10). He is "damned tired, and it [death] can't come too soon" (I,p.10).

It is soon evident that Larry's philosophical detachment has not produced a calm. By his own admission

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[3]Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt, (Boston, 1964), p. 341.

he is "afraid to live" and "even more afraid to die" (III, p.196). He confesses:

> So I sit here with my pride drowned on the bottom of a bottle, keeping drunk so I won't see myself shaking in my britches with fright, or hear myself whining and praying: Beloved Christ, let me live a little longer at any price! If it's only for a few days more, or a few hours even, have mercy, Almighty God, and let me still clutch greedily to my yellow heart this sweet treasure, this jewel beyond price, the dirty stinking bit of withered old flesh which is my beautiful little life! (He laughs with a sneering vindictive self-loathing, staring inward at himself with contempt and hatred.) (III,p.197)

Larry has never been able to make a choice or take any forward action. His indecision, as he sees it, has stemmed not from skepticism but from tolerance and compassion. This, of course, is a pipe dream he does not recognize. Yet, he does not seem to be completely convinced about the reason for his indecision. In a weak moment he wails, "Life is too much for me. I'll be a weak fool looking with pity at the two sides of everything till the day I die!" (IV,p.258) Larry believes that he "was born condemned to see all sides of a question. When you're born like that," he points out, "the questions multiply for you until in the end it's all question and no answer" (I,p.30). Disgusted with life and its problems, he denounces a suffering, foundering mankind and announces his secession:

> All I know is I'm sick of life! I'm through! I've forgotten myself! I'm drowned and contented

> on the bottom of a bottle--Honor or dishonor, faith or treachery are nothing to me but the opposites of the same stupidity which is ruler and king of life, and in the end they rot into dust in the same grave. All things are the same meaningless joke to me, for they grin at me from the one skull of death. (II,p.128)

Larry is unaware that his secession will prove to be a pipe dream. By seceding, he believes he can relieve himself of the responsibility of decision and action. This makes life a little more bearable to him.

The content of Larry's pipe dream is never completely divulged, so it is not possible to give sufficient motives for his self-hatred and bitterness. Larry becomes increasingly distressed when other characters in the play try to disinter his dead and buried dreams. It is noticeable that Larry's life seems to be completely absent of love. Any reason for this disaffection remains hidden. However, Edwin Engel says that the cause probably lay in Larry's innate weakness, his compulsion to "see all sides of a question."[4] It was that weakness in part which led Larry to withdraw from another faith, the Syndicalist-Anarchist Movement. This was an anti-government organization in which Larry had formerly been involved. We infer from information slowly conveyed that the other factor leading to his withdrawal from the Movement was that of love. Larry had once been very much in love with

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[4]See Engel, pp. 285-287.

one of the active members of this organization, Rosa Parritt. This love affair ended in disappointment and disillusionment.

In the course of two days, Larry completes a cycle which begins with dubious peace, moves through emotional distress, and returns to a peace that is more genuine--the kind which death alone can bring. The distress is precipitated by the arrival of two people--Hickey, a hardware salesman; and Don Parritt, until recently a member of the Movement and son of Rosa Parritt. The ensuing commotion of confession, self-revelation, resolution and action all seem to justify Larry's denial of love and life and affirmation of hate and death. One truth seems to emerge for all of them--love is an illusion, and all women are bitches or whores. Hickey's wife and Parritt's mother represent antithetical aspects of love--the former an excess of love and the latter, a deficiency. Both generate hate in the men who are closely associated with them. Hickey's and Parritt's tales are counterpointed in the play, and it is necessary to consider each before Larry's story can be fully understood.

The first of the two men to appear in Harry Hope's saloon is Don Parritt, who has fled from the West Coast after his mother was arrested following a bombing in which several people were killed. Her involvement in this freedom movement has pushed Parritt out of her life completely, leaving him alone to wander at will. Parritt

realizes that now his mother is deprived of her freedom, she is as good as dead. The fact that he was the one who betrayed the Movement and caused his mother to be arrested puts an unbearable burden of guilt on him. He seeks relief from this guilt by telling his story to Larry Slade. He chooses to talk to Larry because Larry was once in love with Rosa and he believes this was the reason Larry left the Movement. Parritt, however, does not intend to relate the real reason for his guilt; he will only admit that he has defected from the Movement.

Parritt resented the value his mother placed in the Movement. He tells Larry, "To hear her go on sometimes, you'd think she was the Movement" (I,p.31). Then, feeling confused and guilty, he says, "I can't believe it about her. She's always been so free" (I,p.31). This reminds him of his jealousy of his mother's devotion to freedom that often took the form of sexual promiscuity. According to Parritt, Larry, too, had resented this. He reminds Larry:

> I remember her putting on her high-and-mighty free-woman stuff, saying you were a slave to bourgeois morality and jealousy and you thought a woman you loved was a piece of private property you owned. I remember that you got mad and you told her that you didn't like living with a whore. (II,p.125)

Larry denies that he ever called her that, but Parritt continues, denouncing his home as it it had been a

whorehouse.

Parritt cannot live with the truth of what he has done, so he must find a way to make his reality bearable. To do this he must construct a pipe dream, or, in his situation, an acceptable interpretation concerning the motives for his action. To himself, his pipe dream concerns his betrayal, but to others, it will concern his defection. He first tries to persuade himself and Larry that his mother interfered with his freedom, that she was jealous of him: "She bawled me out because I was going around with tarts" (I,p.32). Soon his resentment of her preoccupation with the Cause, as she called it, causes him to abandon his tale of the tarts to pursue another pipe dream. Speaking of the Movement, he says:

> I got wise it was all a crazy pipe dream! I couldn't go on believing forever that gang was going to change the world by shooting off their loud traps on soapboxes and sneaking around blowing up a lousy building or bridge! (I,p.33)

After elaborating upon this pipe dream within a pipe dream, Parritt confesses his betrayal, but then he hastily constructs a false motive for the defection. Thus he finds temporary refuge in the pipe dream of patriotism:

> I didn't want this country to be destroyed for a damned foreign pipe dream. After all, I'm from Old American pioneer stock. I began to feel I was a traitor for helping a lot of cranks and bums and free women plot to overthrow our government. And then I saw it was my duty to my country . . . . (II,p.127)

After chastisement from Larry for such hypocritical cant, Parritt admits that this story is false and scurries back to the previous one. Again he seeks to persuade himself that he has enjoyed a sex life apart from his mother, feeling that this would have justified his betrayal. "I got stuck on a whore," he lies, "and wanted dough to blow in on her and have a good time! That's all I did it for! Just money" (III,p.160). Larry, however, has observed Parritt's revulsion for the three prostitutes in Hope's saloon and is able to surmise the situation. For Parritt "whore" and "mother" are synonymous. "I'm through with whores," he declares vindictively. "I wish they were all in jail, or dead!" (IV,p.221) By this time his pipe dream has begun to collapse and death begins to haunt him. Having expressed indirectly his wish for his mother's death, he feels she wishes the same for him. At this point he gives up and relaxes limply in his chair. In a low voice in which there is a strange exhausted relief, he relinquishes his "sustaining lie": "I may as well confess, Larry. There's no use lying any more. You know, anyway . . . . I didn't give a damn about the money. It was because I hated her" (IV,p.241). Parritt reveals now that his motives were those of a son scorned. He concludes his confessional:

> And I'm not putting up any bluff, either, that
> I was crazy afterwards when I laughed to myself

> and thought, "You know what you can do with your freedom pipe dream now, don't you, you damned old bitch!" (IV,p.247)

It is certain that no pipe dream can support the weight of such guilt. Sizing up the situation, Larry realizes that Parritt suffers from the same indecision as he. He also understands that death is the only answer for Parritt; it is the only way he can find peace. Therefore, Larry makes the decision which Parritt is incapable of making for himself by urging him to jump off the fire escape. Larry's face is convulsed with detestation, and his quivering voice has a condemning pity in it as he cries, "Go, get the hell out of life, God damn you, before I choke it out of you!" (IV,p.248). Parritt's manner is at once transformed. He seems suddenly at peace with himself. He speaks simply and gratefully:

> Thanks, Larry, I just wanted to be sure. I can see now it's the only possible way I can ever get free from her. I guess I've really known that all my life. (He pauses, then with a derisive smile.) It ought to comfort Mother a little, too. It'll give her the chance to play the great incorruptible Mother of the Revolution, whose only child is the Proletariat. She'll be able to say: "Justice is done! So may all traitors die!" She'll be able to say: "I'm glad he's dead! Long live the Revolution!" (He adds with a final implacable jeer.) You know her, Larry. Always a ham! (IV,p.248)

Larry pleads distractedly: "Go, for the love of Christ, you mad tortured bastard, for your own sake!" (IV,p.248) Before he can break down and sob, Parritt goes.

Parritt's pipe dreams can neither sustain him nor give him peace because they cannot support the guilt he suffers. There is only one way to obtain absolution and peace, and that is through death. When Parritt admits the falsity of his pipe dream, he commits a kind of spiritual suicide, for he has killed his "sustaining lie." This releases him from the tremendous guilt, however, and gives him a kind of peace. The only thing that can bring real peace and complete absolution is through the supreme act of self-punishment--suicide. Parritt goes resolutely to this peace, knowing full well it is the only way.

As previously mentioned, Parritt is not alone responsible for the turmoil precipitated in Larry. Hickey, the hardware salesman, who comes to sell "peace," is also responsible for the unmasking of Larry.

Hickey turns up annually to give the derelicts a party on Harry Hope's birthday. His real mission this time, however, is to sell the derelicts the idea that they can find peace only if they rid themselves of their "lying pipe dreams." Larry alone has perceived that this is the peace of death.

Hickey is glib and brash and admits having acquired the knack of salesmanship from his father who was a "hell-fire preacher" in the sticks of Indiana. In his home town everyone had thought Hickey was a no-good tramp and would continue to be one. He insisted he wanted to reform and

promised himself that he would. When his family and friends did not believe in him, he rebelled and cut himself away from home entirely. Time proved that he was a tramp and enjoyed it, even though he still made claims to a future reformation.

Hickey married a childhood sweetheart and discovered that she "was a sucker for a pipe dream," (IV,p.233) for nothing on earth could shake her faith in him or her dream about the future. Evelyn's pipe dream was that she believed Hickey would reform. She always forgave his delay and excused his wicked ways. "That's what made it so hard," (IV,p.235) he explained. "That's what made me feel such a rotten skunk--her always forgiving me" (IV,p.235). She forgave him when she knew about the tarts he went out with, even when he contracted a venereal disease and passed it on to her. On such occasions he "could see disgust having a battle in her eyes with love. Love always won" (IV,p.237). He wished that she had not been so good, that she, too, would be unfaithful. "Go on, why don't you, Evelyn?" he would say. He would pretend he was kidding--the same way he used to joke at the saloon about her being in the hay with the iceman.

Hickey's own pipe dream made it possible for him to "hold his head up" while he lived a drunken, sodden life. But Evelyn's pipe dream put an unbearable burden of guilt on him because it constructed an image of a man

he was not nor could become and forgave him for not becoming the man of that image. It defeated him for it excused every action he took. He could do nothing willful and intentional because her love and forgiveness would negate it.

Just as Melody in A Touch of the Poet hated Nora's pipe dream of love, Hickey hated Evelyn's pipe dream. He hated her for making him hate himself so much. Her love and forgiveness generated shame, guilt, and hate in him and made his evil seem unbearably black. He had yearned to settle into an agreeable, natural depravity, to follow his inclinations, however bad, without feeling haunted by love and virtue. He wanted a peace without love, for he had no love to correspond with Evelyn's love.

Since Hickey could do nothing about his evil, he decided he could do something about the goodness that tortured him so. He kills Evelyn. In killing her, he makes the "iceman" come, for the iceman represents death. The Gelbs discuss this coming of death:

> Hickey's wife has really taken Death to her breast when she marries--her insistence on her great love for Hickey and his undying love for her and her death-like grip on his conscience--her insistence that he can change and not get drunk and sleep with whores--is making Death breathe hard on her breast as he approaches ever nearer--as he is about "to come" in the vernacular sense.[5]

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[5]Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York, 1962), p. 831.

The Gelbs explain further:

> So when he finally had to kill her, knowing he had to be true to his own nature and go off to Harry's saloon for a shot of Hope, a big drunk and a week with the tarts and bums, he first had to cook another pill of opium and grab the beautiful pipe dream that he was killing her for love so she wouldn't suffer any longer from his incurable debauchery.[6]

Hickey reveals his pipe dream when he says that if he had killed himself "she'd have died of a broken heart":

> You see, Evelyn loved me. And I loved her. That was the trouble. It would have been easy to find a way out if she hadn't loved me so much. Or if I hadn't loved her. But as it was, there was only one possible way. (IV,p.227)

Hickey's delusion vanishes when he discovers that with Evelyn's death he no longer has the desire to go off on a drunk. He is forced to grasp at a new pipe dream--that his release from a guilt-ridden marriage has cleansed him and removed the need for debauchery.

When Hickey comes to the saloon, he plans to sell peace to his derelict friends by revealing to them the lies of their pipe dreams. On former visits to the saloon, he is said to have brought kindness and laughter. This time, however, "there's something not human behind his damned grinning and kidding" (II,p.126). The bums are immediately suspicious for he refuses to drink, after which he announces

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[6]Gelb and Gelb, p. 601.

that he has also thrown overboard "the damned lying pipe dream" that had been making him miserable. Believing he has discarded his dream, he is at peace with himself and therefore does not "need booze anymore" (I,p.79).

Hickey speaks to the derelicts, persuading them to begin a "new life of peace and contentment where no pipe dreaming can ever nag at you again" (II,p.144). He is earnest in his persuasion since he believes his own peace will be secured by his selling it to the others. He tells them they must rid themselves of the guilt that makes them lie to themselves that they are something they are not. They are suspicious and resentful, but he is persuasive. Larry alone recognizes that Hickey has started a movement that will blow up the world. These human wrecks sober up long enough to make themselves presentable, and they start forth to do what they have been putting off for years.

The derelicts leave the saloon to face the world outside and to begin their own reformation. In just a few hours they return one by one. Miserable, disillusioned, they are defeated when they have to face an intolerable reality. The truth comes to them that their "tomorrow movement" is only a lie. They are forced to admit that they do not really want to reform, nor do they intend to reform. The victims plunge deeper than ever into the depths of their despair. Their reform movement has destroyed the

decaying contentment of their pipe dreams, robbing them of their last pitiful hope. Even the liquor loses its punch and old friendships turn sour. They find they cannot face the emptiness of themselves without the opium of illusion.

Hickey had thought that when the derelicts were freed from the lies of their pipe dreams, they could enjoy a peaceful, contented life. He is shaken by the present condition of the derelicts and realizes he must now try to convince them of the wisdom of his action. He begins to relate to them the facts concerning the death of his wife. The lie of Hickey's pipe dream comes to light now, for they see he has been afraid to get drunk because he might tell his secret, namely, that he has killed his wife. Hickey's new pipe dream vanishes when he discovers that his friends will not buy it. They are appalled at what he has done and regard it as the act of an insane man. Hickey's realization of what he has actually done and why he did it brings down tremendous guilt upon him. The "peace" he has had is destroyed when the lie of his pipe dream is revealed. He knows that genuine peace can come only after he has achieved absolution from his guilt. This can come only through complete self-punishment. Hickey calls the police, and when they arrive he makes his confession. However, he is not able to come calmly to death and peace as Parritt was able to do. While being

taken away, he frantically clutches at a last pipe dream--that he was insane at the time he killed his wife. Hickey's last illusion comes as a blessing to the derelicts, for it enables them to restore their own pipe dreams. If Hickey were insane, then all his insistence about destroying pipe dreams and facing reality to find peace was just the mad ranting of a crazy man. They convince themselves that they knew Hickey was insane all the time and that they faced reality only to humor him. The derelicts reassume their old pipe dreams concerning "tomorrow" and go back to their sodden, contented way of living.

Hickey's last illusion makes it possible for the derelicts to go back to their illusions, but Larry cannot go back. One of his pipe dreams has been that he is not afraid to die, when in reality he is afraid of the death which he calls "a fine long sleep."

Larry experiences what Leonard Chabrewe terms "a living death."[7] This living death proceeds from a fear of physical death combined with a fear of life, though here the former does not give rise to the latter. The fear of life arises directly from recognition of the reality of life itself. This implies that the pain and despair of life sooner or later becomes unbearable unless Larry is able to find a way to hide himself from reality in

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[7]Leonard Chabrewe, "Dionysus in 'The Iceman Cometh,'" Modern Drama, IV (February 1962), 379.

some kind of pipe dream of something better.

The fear of physical death can also arise directly from reality. It is as natural to fear death as it is inevitable to experience the pain of life. With Larry, the result is that eventually reality brings him to the point where he is caught between his fear of life and his fear of death. He then has no choice but to escape reality in the illusion of a pipe dream. By doing this, he enters into a state of psychological death.

Chabrewe elaborates on Larry's state of psychological death. He feels that by escaping in the illusion of a pipe dream, Larry separates himself psychologically from the reality of life so as to be unable to experience its pain and despair. The pipe dream enables Larry to do this by making it appear as though he were existing in reality. The difference is that the pain Larry experiences is not felt. It is now only an appearance of pain.

For Larry, reality is thus ultimately a choice between psychological and physical death. When his pipe dream, psychological death, is shattered, there is left no choice but physical death inasmuch as life is unlivable. By realizing the fallacy of his pipe dream, Larry knows that he, too, has been addicted. He defines his dilemma when he says that he is afraid to live and even more afraid to die.

Larry has tried to withdraw from the struggle to

exist by refusing to participate in life. When Parritt forced Larry to support his resolution to commit suicide, he made Larry take at least temporary action. In doing this, Larry is made to realize that he is a participant in life. Hearing Parritt fall from the fire escape causes "a long forgotten faith to return to him for a moment" (IV,p.258). This moment of faith comes just as Larry realizes that the death of Parritt brings the death of his last pipe dream. He knows now that his secession from life was only an illusion on his part. This flash of faith is brief and out of character as far as O'Neill's last plays are concerned. O'Neill never alludes to such a faith again, and it is hard to understand why it has a place here. Engel points out that the key to understanding this brief moment of faith lies in the contents of Larry's pipe dream concerning love. Since facts concerning this were never completely revealed, an understanding of this faith can never be complete.[8]

After this moment O'Neill quickly regains any equilibrium he has lost and in the next lines causes Larry to open his eyes with bitter self-derision and say:

> Be God, there's no hope! I'll never be a success in the grandstand--or anywhere else! Life is too much for me! Be God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here.

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[8]See Engel, pp. 285-287.

> From the bottom of my coward's heart I mean that now. (IV,p.258)

Like Hickey and Parritt, Larry accepts physical death as the only way out inasmuch as it is impossible for him to return to the world of illusion.

The pessimistic theme of the unlivability of life reveals itself uncompromisingly in the last act of the play. This theme is supported by the Gelbs when they say that "man cannot live without illusion, that he must cling to his pipe dreams, even knowing they are pipe dreams, in order to survive."[9] As everyone, with the exception of Larry and Parritt, escapes from Hickey back into his own illusion, the life and death struggle is seen to have been a struggle between two forms of death. Hickey brought physical death with him to what had been the stronghold of psychological death, or what Larry calls "the Palace of Pipe Dreams." This physical death was in the form of reality. Confronting the truth of oneself in this Palace of Pipe Dreams could ultimately result only in horror and disgust. Consequently, the natural result is self-destruction.

The prompter of self-destruction is the iceman (Hickey, the iceman, and death all are the same). Cyrus Day

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[9]Quoted by Robert C. Wright in "O'Neill's Universalizing Technique in 'The Iceman Cometh,'" Modern Drama, VIII (May 1965), 9.

states that "all men are waiting for the iceman, but only those who have shed their ultimate illusions are aware that the final and unrealized meaning of their lives is death."[10] Larry and Parritt support this completely through their reactions to their exposed pipe dreams.

According to Chabrewe:

> If men were capable of a higher form of spiritual life by which they could overcome reality, they would not have to escape it in death. But as it is, death in one form or another is the inevitable result.[11]

This seems to reinforce O'Neill's letter to George Jean Nathan. O'Neill believed the roots of this sickness lay in the death of the Old God. Because science and materialism were unable to provide any satisfying new One, the surviving primitive religious instinct could not find a meaning for life, nor could it comfort its fears of death. O'Neill's characters are left trapped by their own despair with no answer but that found in dreams, drunkenness, and, ultimately, death. Their last tragedy is that there is nothing to calm their fears of an inevitable death.

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[10] Cyrus Day, "The Iceman and the Bridegroom," Modern Drama, I (May 1958), 3.

[11] Chabrewe, p. 381.

CHAPTER IV

THE PIPE DREAM OF ESCAPE IN LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

The pipe dreams of The Iceman Cometh were necessary because man asked more from life than life could give him. But in Long Day's Journey into Night, the pipe dreams are necessary as an escape from what life has done to man. Mary Tyrone sums up the problem in a few words when she says:

> None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever.[1]

Her remark indicates the problem of the pipe dreamers: the cruelty of life leaves man with a loss of self and, consequently, an overwhelming despair. Life becomes a chaos, void of all purpose and meaning. What is needed to make it endurable is the lie of the pipe dream. This is a pipe dream of escape back into the past.

The focal point of Long Day's Journey is the mother's (Mary Tyrone) lapsing back to her old dope addiction and

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[1]Eugene O'Neill, Long Day's Journey into Night (New Haven, Conn., 1966), II, p. 6. Act and page numbers hereafter given in text.

the shattering of the family's pipe dream that she has been cured. The atmosphere of the Tyrone household is further clouded by the fact that Edmund has just been told he has consumption and must go away to the sanatorium. The family tries to shield this from Mary, fearing that the upset would be reason enough for her to resume taking dope. They know that through the illusions resulting from her taking dope, she would completely leave them. What they do not realize is that her escape has already begun. As hope vanishes, each member of the family is driven into his own dark night of despair. The play is taken up with confessions eliciting confessions, all involving conflicts of hate and love, guilt and accusation, with each Tyrone doomed to destroy and to be destroyed.

The reason for Mary's taking dope lies in her need to escape what life has done to her. The romantic dream of her youth was shattered when she had to face life as it really was. She was a young wonder-eyed girl when she first met James Tyrone, an accomplished actor who achieved fame through his role of the Count of Monte Cristo. At that time her very sophisticated parents were sending her to the convent to receive some special training in music, for Mary hoped to be a fine concert pianist. But not only did she want to be a pianist, she also wanted to become a nun. As love would have it, she dropped her aspirations of a musical career and of possibly becoming a nun; she

married the actor, not realizing what demands the theatrical life would make on her. Her first son, Jamie, was born while she was "on the road" with her husband. A second son was born but died in infancy from complications that developed while he had the measles. As a result, Mary suffered an extreme sense of guilt, for she had left the infant in the care of a nurse so that she could travel with her husband. Mary was first introduced to morphine after the difficult birth of Edmund, a third son. Extreme unhappiness resulting from her life "on the road," coupled with guilt arising from her son's death, leave Mary with the desire to escape reality and its harshness. She finds she can do this through the means of dope. The dope dreams become her pipe dreams for they allow her to go back into the past to the time when she was happy.

Early in the play the family sees indications that Mary has resumed taking dope. She knows they know but continues to slip farther and farther away from them. She feels guilty for leaving them so she tries to make amends by giving the family "reasons" for her unusual habits. She realizes her responsibility for the misery of the family but is not able to absolve herself. When she realizes that Edmund's ill health might be traced back to her own actions, the guilt becomes too great, so she hastily constructs a small pipe dream by which she can deny the consumption and persuade herself that it is but

a summer cold. She cannot forgive herself for her infant son's death, so she places the blame on young Jamie, who, she says, purposely gave his younger brother the measles.

When James Tyrone realizes that Mary is trying to escape to the past, he begs her, "For God's sake, forget the past!" But she can only answer, "How can I? The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us" (II,p.87). For her, the present and the future are trapped by the past, and she has no power to break the grip of that past. Since the present and the future are unbearable, she can resort only to going back. She tries to explain that dope is her only means of going back, for "it kills the pain [the pain of the present and the future]. You go back until at last you are beyond its reach. Only the past when you were happy is real" (III,p.104).

By the end of the play Mary has completely retreated to the past. James and Edmund are sitting in the living room trying to drink away their troubles. Jamie is already in a drunken stupor. Mary comes in, sits at the piano, and plays the opening of one of Chopin's simpler waltzes. This sad, woeful playing is just one of the fragments left over from the broken romantic dreams of her youth. She abruptly stops and dreamily walks toward the men.

> She wears a sky-blue dressing gown over her nightdress, dainty slippers with pompons on

> her bare feet. Her face is paler than ever. Her eyes look enormous. They glisten like polished black jewels. The uncanny thing is that her face now appears so youthful. Experience seems ironed out of it. It is a marble mask of girlish innocence, the mouth caught in a shy smile. Her white hair is braided in two pig tails which hang over her breast. Over one arm, carried neglectfully, trailing on the floor, as if she had forgotten it, is an old-fashioned white satin wedding gown, trimmed with duchesse lace. She hesitates in the doorway, glancing round the room, her forehead puckered puzzledly, like someone who has come to a room to get something but has become absentminded on the way and forgotten what it was. They stare at her. She seems aware of them merely as she is aware of other objects in the room, the furniture, the windows, familiar things she accepts automatically as naturally belonging there but which she is too preoccupied to notice. (IV,p.170)

All that she says indicates that she is indeed lost somewhere between the past and the present. She believes herself to be in the past, but she cannot understand the toll that time has taken on her appearance. She says, "Something horrible has happened to my hands. The fingers have gotten so stiff . . . the knuckles are all swollen. They're so ugly. I'll have to go to the Infirmary and show Sister Martha"(IV,p.171). And a little later: "Let me see. What did I come here to find? It's terrible, how absent-minded I've become. I'm always dreaming and forgetting" (IV,p.171). When James offers to take the wedding dress so she will not tear it, she gives it to him and thanks him, commenting:

> It's very lovely, isn't it? . . . I found it in the attic hidden in a trunk. But I don't

> know what I wanted it for. I'm going to be a nun--that is, if I can only find . . . what is it I'm looking for? I know it's something I lost." (IV,p.172)

This something she has lost is the child of happiness who lived in her innocent past. This was the child who put complete faith and hope in her romantic dreams and saw them crushed by the events in her life. The importance of the faith of this former self is clearly explained to James when Mary tells him, ". . . something I need terribly. I remember when I had it I was never lonely nor afraid. I can't have lost it forever, I would die if I thought that. Because then there would be no hope" (IV,p.173). Mary points out the time when she lost this faith in life. She has been remembering how Mother Elizabeth at the Convent had advised her to pray for certainty before deciding to become a nun. Mary says:

> I never dreamed Holy Mother would give me such advice! I was really shocked. I said, of course, I would do anything she suggested, but I knew it was simply a waste of time. After I left her, I felt all mixed up, so I went to the Shrine and prayed to the Blessed Virgin and found peace again because I knew she heard my prayer and would always love me and see no harm ever came to me so long as I never lost my faith in her! (IV,p.176)

Here Mary pauses and a look of growing uneasiness comes over her face. She passes a hand over her forehead as if to brush cobwebs from her brain, then vaguely continues, "That was in the winter of senior year. Then in the spring

something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time" (IV, p.176).

There was, however, something else to prevent the fulfillment of such a romantic dream. This was Mary's falling in love with Tyrone. Part of Mary's loss and consequent despair has been caused by the demands of her husband's pipe dream. James Tyrone is a proud, ambitious man who resembles in many ways Melody of A Touch of the Poet. His pride, his desire for money and fame, and his stubborn ignorance have caused him to sacrifice his wife and children to his need to secure the wealth denied him in his youth. His tragedy is that he has sold his chance for real achievement for the illusion of success. Mary's return to dope addiction is the stroke that finally disarms him, leaving him bared to the truth of his failure and misery. He faces up to the lie of his pipe dream when he confesses to Edmund:

> I've never admitted this to anyone before, but tonight, I'm so heartsick I feel at the end of everything, and what's the use of fake pride and pretense. That God-damned play I bought for a song and made such a great success--it ruined me with its promise of an easy fortune. I didn't want to do anything else, and by the time I woke up to the fact I'd become a slave to the damned thing and wanted to try other plays, it was too late. They had identified me with that one part, and didn't want me in anything else . . . . (IV,p.149)

There is only one means of "peace" for him, and that is

to be found in drunkenness. This peace of drunkenness he now shares with his son Jamie, who also has failed to achieve any degree of success in life.[2]

Like his father and his brother, Edmund finds escape from the present through drunkenness. However, this drunkenness differs in that its motive is an attempt to realize a romantic dream rather than to find "peace" after a pipe dream has been shattered. Long Day's Journey is autobiographical and depicts O'Neill's family in the later years of their lives. Eugene O'Neill is depicted in the role of Edmund, the younger brother, not the elder. Edmund is the dreamer who aspires to an ideal beyond the present. Like Robert of Beyond the Horizon, he has not experienced failure so there is no need for a pipe dream to enable him to sustain life. He is bursting with inspiration to live beyond reality and therefore has set up no confining images or goals which he must achieve. The close relationship between the reason for the romantic dream and that of the pipe dream is seen in Edmund's extreme desire and need to escape that with which he cannot cope. When his hope of recovery and his hope of his mother's cure are shattered, he announces to his father that "all we can do is try to be resigned, [or]," he adds, "be so drunk you can forget" (IV,p.132). He quotes from Symons' translation of

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[2]Jamie's story will be told in A Moon for the Misbegotten, the sequel to Long Day's Journey.

Baudelaire's prose poem:

> Be always drunken. Nothing else matters: that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to the earth, be drunken continually.
>
> Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will. But be drunken.
>
> And if sometimes, on the stairs of a palace, or on the green side of a ditch, or in the dreary solitude of your own room, you should awaken and the drunkenness be half or wholly slipped away from you, ask of the wind, or of the wave, or of the star, or of the bird, or of the clock, of whatever flies, or sighs, or rocks, or sings, or speaks, ask what hour it is, and the wind, wave, star, bird, clock, will answer you: "It is the hour to be drunken! Be drunken, if you would not be martyred slaves of Time; be drunken continually! With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will." (IV,p.132)

Edmund aspires to sensation which is beyond reality, to become something more than human. By doing this he can completely escape the physical which in reality has betrayed him through his contraction of consumption. His quest for drunkenness is an effort to quench the thirst for an ideal which he can only symbolize in terms of the beauty of nature. In a long monologue addressed to his father, he describes this drunkenness:

> I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it, and for a moment I lost myself--actually lost myself. I was set free! I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and high dim-starred sky! I belonged, without past or future,

> within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of Man, to Life itself. To God, if you want to put it that way. (IV,p.153)

Another time he describes his feeling he had while in the crow's nest of a ship:

> Dreaming, not keeping lookout, feeling alone, and above, and apart, watching the dawn creep like a painted dream over the sky and sea which slept together. Then the moment of ecstatic freedom came. The peace, the end of the quest, the last harbor, the joy of belonging to a fulfillment beyond men's lousy, pitiful, greedy fears and hopes and dreams! (IV,p.153)

In contrast to Edmund, Jamie, too, had watched many sunrises, but his dawns came "creeping grayly over dirty windowpanes, with some tart snoring beside [him]."[3] This last harbor, even though it must be experienced through the imagination, elicits a will to live whereas Larry Slades' last harbor in Iceman was really the "end of the line." Edmund describes his transcendence, or his becoming one with nature:

> [I] became the sun, the hot sand, green seaweed anchored to a rock, swaying in the tide. Like a saint's vision of beatitude. Like the veil of things as they seem drawn back by an unseen hand. For a second you see--and seeing the secret, are the secret. For a second there is meaning! Then the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone, but in the fog again, and you stumble on toward nowhere, for no good reason. (IV,p.153)

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[3]From Moon for the Misbegotten.

At this point Edmund begins to sense the futility of his romantic dream. For a while his dream could bear him up above reality, but, as is characteristic of the romantic dream, it soon loses its buoyant powers. Edmund's encounter with reality and its despair arouses bitterness and resentment in him. With a wry grin Edmund sums up his fate:

> It was a great mistake, my being born a man. I would have been much more successful as a sea gull or a fish. As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death! (IV,p.153)

Edmund's ecstatic vision of wholeness has been only momentary, and now he must once again endure the fate of living in reality. He is the exceptional O'Neillan character as he is able to understand early that death is the ultimate escape from Time. Because he understands he must be a little in love with death, that he must come to terms with death eventually before finding peace, he does not need the pipe-dream experience in order to survive.[4]

O'Neill's comment on the destructive power of the romantic dream is shown through Mary's coming down the stairs into the living room where the family are trying

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[4]See Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (Boston, 1964), p. 355.

to drink themselves into forgetfulness. Her pipe dream of escape into the past is successful in the fact that it does enable her to transcend the failure of reality. Its fallacy, however, is revealed in her physically having to live in the present even though imaginatively and psychologically she may have achieved escape into the past. She is still wife and mother to the family, though to herself she is a child of the past. The limp wedding dress she carries neglectfully over her arm is indicative of the shattered romantic dreams that trail after the human wrecks of this play. It is evidence to Edmund, especially, of the futility of his own dreams. To Tyrone and Jamie it is evidence of the destruction they all suffer as the result of an impossible dream.

Long Day's Journey repeats O'Neill's theme of the pipe dream. For Mary, it is the lie of the pipe dream that gives her life. For James Tyrone and Jamie, the revelation of the lie of their pipe dreams and their inability to assume another pipe dream means destruction and death. With this death, however, there is no peace, for they have not been able to come to terms with the lie of the pipe dream.

Henry Hewes views the structure of this theme in terms of "planes of existence."[5] He believes that

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[5]Cargill, Fagin, Fisher, eds., O'Neill and His Plays (New York University, 1961), p. 217, quoting Henry Hewes in the Saturday Review, Nov. 24, 1956.

most people live in several planes of existence. For example, there is the plane of impulse, in which we respond spontaneously and without reflection. Then there is the plane of society, in which we impress and/or deceive other people. There is the plane of compromise, in which we tolerate the undesirable rather than risk a correction. There is the plane of contemplation, in which we search for the truth of what we are. The last plane is that of escape and dreams. In Long Day's Journey O'Neill has shown the members of the Tyrone family slipping back and forth from one plane to another. He doesn't sentimentalize, neither does he moralize. He blames no outside agency for the collective failure of his family. He has Mary explain his sentiments when she says:

> None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever. (II,p.6)

Long Day's Journey is a play of lostness in which the only means of knowing and belonging to an identity is through the pipe dream. When the pipe dream is dissolved, there is left only death.

CHAPTER V

SELF-HATRED AND THE PIPE DREAM IN A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN

A Moon for the Misbegotten continues the story of James Tyrone, Jr., of Long Day's Journey. Tyrone is an alcoholic seeking escape from his own inadequacies and from the guilt he bears for action he has taken against his mother. Temporary refuge for him comes in drunkenness and lechery. But he can find satisfaction only in ugly, oversized women, the prostitutes who have been rejected by other men. These outcast women feed his self-hatred and his need for a mother-substitute.

A confession within the play reveals Tyrone's story. He bears guilt because of a lifelong hatred of his father and love and guilty longing for his mother. During his father's lifetime he was a drunkard and a ne'er-do-well, as is clearly shown in Long Day's Journey. After his father's death he stopped his drinking for his mother's sake. "It made me happy to do it," he explains. When his mother became ill, and when Tyrone knew she was dying, he turned to alcohol again. He explains, "I know damned well just before she died she recognized me. She saw I was drunk. Then she closed her eyes so she couldn't see,

and was glad to die."[1]

His mother had provided purpose and value in his life, and when she died, and especially under these particular circumstances, Tyrone's life became a void, without emotion and without the capacity to grieve. He traveled across the country by train with his mother's body in the baggage coach ahead, and he spent his drunken nights with a prostitute whom he had picked up along the way. Tyrone reduces his motives for this debauchery to vengeance upon his mother for leaving him. From this point on, all his efforts have been toward obliterating his guilt and toward punishing himself not only for his behavior toward his mother but also for his feelings toward her, with their unconscious overtones of incest and hatred. As with many other pipe dreamers in these last plays, he hates the thing he loves--he rebels against his dependency and then flagellates himself for having desecrated such a relationship.

Tyrone has inherited a small farm from his father and rents that farm to Phil Hogan and his daughter Josie. Hogan is a small, wily man who has become friends with Tyrone. Tyrone enjoys visiting at the Hogan farm, drinking with the father and daughter and joking with them about their Standard Oil neighbor, Harder. Harder would like

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[1]Eugene O'Neill, A Moon for the Misbegotten (New York, 1952), III, p. 147. Act and page numbers hereafter given in text.

very much to buy the small farm from Tyrone so that he might rid himself of his peasant neighbors. But Tyrone, in friendship to Hogan, has promised him first chance at buying the farm. Hogan, of course, cannot afford to buy, but Tyrone's promise makes it possible for him to continue living there.

Hogan and Josie live alone on the farm. The sons have left home because of their father's crude, tyrannical ways. Josie, a large, powerful woman, has remained. She can do the work of several men and is quite able to control her father whenever he is on one of his drunken sprees.

Josie's grotesque appearance and her slovenly ways have prevented her from enjoying the love of anyone. She is very sensitive to this lack and feels keenly the need to belong to someone, to be recognized as a member of society. She has created the pipe dream of being desired by the men of her neighborhood and has supported this pipe dream by making her boasts that she has slept with all the men. The logic to her pipe dream is that it is better to be desired in any way than not to be desired at all. Josie is attracted to Tyrone because he represents all that she desires and has never had. He has a small inheritance, has been to college, and is accepted to some degree by society. Meanwhile, Hogan has watched Tyrone and Josie and realizes that they need one another's friendship. He believes them to be lovers and devises

a plan to bring the two together. He takes advantage of the farm situation and pretends to Josie that Tyrone has made a bargain with Harder concerning the farm. Hogan tells Josie that they must do something to prevent this. He suggests that she entice Tyrone over to see her one night and that she should get him drunk enough to be able to talk him into going to bed with her. Hogan then proposes to come and and discover the two. He will then blackmail Tyrone by forcing him either to marry Josie or to pay him (Hogan) the price of the farm in order to avoid scandal.

Josie is able to carry out part of Hogan's plan. Tyrone comes over to visit Josie, but they spend the night together talking on the back doorsteps. Their night proves to be very different from what she had expected. Instead of a night of exploitation and gratification, it is a night of analysis and confession. Tyrone confronts Josie with the truth of what she really is, but at first she refuses to admit that she is really a virgin. She is disappointed that Tyrone thinks of her as a mother-image rather than as a lover. Tyrone cannot accept the fullness of Josie's love, for he bears the burden of betraying the love of his mother.[2] He

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[2]See Allen Lewis, American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre (New York, 1966), p. 28.

understands his own situation and that of Josie when he says:

> You can take the truth, Josie, from me. Because you and I belong to the same club. We can kid the world but we can't fool ourselves, like most people, no matter what we do, nor escape ourselves no matter where we run away. Whether it's the bottom of a bottle, or a South Sea island, we'd find our own ghosts there waiting to greet us, "sleepless with pale commemorative eyes," as Rossetti wrote. You don't ask how I saw through your bluff, Josie. You pretend too much. (III,p.135)

Josie is aware of the truth of Tyrone's accusation that it is her "pride" which makes her take this pose, for she is actually a virgin, longing to transcend her gross flesh in a spiritual love but ashamed of this purity which seems so incongruous in a "great, ugly cow" of a woman. She realizes that for this night Tyrone needs the "mother-image" and not the lover in her, and she is willing to comply. Like Nora in A Touch of the Poet, Josie is able to see the fallacy of her pipe dream; yet, because she realizes her need for the pipe dream, she can continue living by it. Even though it is a lie, it must suffice, for she can find no other.

Tyrone's choosing Josie rather than one of the cute Broadway tarts is not strange, for there is a kind of absolution that comes through loving the unlovable. The void in him can be filled just as the seaman's was in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner when he is able to

love the meaner creatures. In Josie's grotesqueness he can see his own wretchedness. In her need for him, he can see his need for being loved and for having his own guilt forgiven. In fulfilling Josie's needs, he believes his own may be reciprocated. When Tyrone comes to Josie, his one desire is for expiation. In Josie's maternal and redemptive love for him, Tyrone at last finds forgiveness and release. When he confesses to Josie and discovers that he is still loved in spite of the hateful self he has revealed in his confession to her, he is absolved. There now comes to him a kind of peace, an ability to die. Josie's forgiveness is the fulfillment of his mother's blessing: "May you have your wish and die in your sleep soon, Jim darling. May you rest forever in forgiveness and peace" (IV,p.177).

The final scene of the play produces a single unforgettable image. It is dawn and Josie sits on the steps of her shack, her arms around Tyrone who is asleep, his head on her breast. They have waited through the night; the dawn comes, bright and beautiful, but these two misbegotten lovers have passed beyond hope. Josie had hoped to evoke physical love from Jim, for she knew that a spiritual love was impossible. She has discovered that he is really emotionally dead. Mary McCarthy aptly describes this scene:

> The defeat of all human plans and contrivances is suddenly shaped in the picture of the

> titanese [sic] sitting staring at a stage moon with a shriveled male infant drunkenly asleep at her side. The image of the survivors takes on a certain grotesque epic form; the woman, stage-center, like a gentle beached whale, appears for an instant as the last survivor of the world.[3]

O'Neill's theme is repeated. Josie can go on simply because she can recognize but accept the lie of the pipe dream and use its buoyant powers despite its very obvious falsity. But for Tyrone, honesty cuts through the lie of the pipe dream and leaves him with no choice but the oblivion to be found in death. Only with death can his final peace come.

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[3]Cargill, Fagin, Fisher, eds., O'Neill and His Plays (New York University, 1961), p. 210, quoting Mary McCarthy, Sights and Spectacles (London, n.d. Originally published in New York Times Book Review, August 31, 1952).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In the last plays O'Neill's characters are searchers after life and their real selves. Yet at the same time they reject reality for they cannot accept it as it is. This is pointed out by Tom Driver in his article "On the Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill." He says that:

> In Long Day's Journey into Night, A Touch of the Poet, and Moon for the Misbegotten, no character expresses the rejection of life as absolutely as Larry Slade [Iceman Cometh], but each of those plays is written from his perspective. The playwright's rebuke to Cornelius Melody [Touch] is that he was not strong enough to face truth and die. The sense of pathos in Moon for the Misbegotten arises from the fact that James Tyrone, Sr. did not know that the real substitute for his mother's breast was not the tomb of earth. The playwright's courage in Long Day's Journey carries him into the night.[1]

John Raleigh goes even further in explaining that these searchers are seeking a self:

> In two of O'Neill's late plays, A Touch of the Poet and The Iceman Cometh, two ambiguous characters, Con Melody and Hickey, have a preoccupation with mirrors. Throughout A Touch of the Poet Con continues to look at himself in the mirror, and Hickey speaks of

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[1]Tom F. Driver, "On the Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill," Tulane Drama Review, III (December 1958), 8-20.

> having done so. When they look into a mirror they are, of course, searching for themselves, looking to see if they can see what they are. In the opening part of Book VII of The Republic in the parable of the Cave, Plato also talks of a number of men in chains. By a flickering light they see on the wall of the cave images which they take for reality, while in truth they are only seeing shadows. On the scale of Plato's fourfold level of perception they dwell on the lowest level, the perception of shadows. Further, they are habituated to their semi-blind condition and would be not only resentful of but hostile toward the philosopher who would force them out of the dark cave and up the rugged ascent to the light of the sun and reality. Most of them anyway will never make the journey. For, as they fear death, they are at home in the ambiguous darkness of the cave (or the bar) and ill at ease in the open and in the sun of reason.
>
> Fearing death, shunning the light, men also suffer from a cosmic loneliness and a corresponding doubt as to who and what they are. In Pascal's words: "I know not who put me into the world, nor what the world is for, nor what I myself am. I am in horrible ignorance of everything. I know not what my body is, nor my senses, nor my soul, nor even that part of me which thinks what I say, which reflects on all and on itself, and knows itself no more than the rest.[2]

The world of O'Neill's characters is filled with death, darkness, and doubt. And here, illusion is the only protection they have. At their deepest level, his characters are concerned with the endless ambiguities of the relationship between illusion and reality. For them there is no final message about their problem. They must and they must not live by means of illusion.

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[2]John H. Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (Carbondale, Illinois, 1965), p. 194.

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